

The Continuing Decision Seminar as a Technique of Instruction

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ABSTRACT

A decision seminar is concerned with knowledge of the policy process and with the evaluation of knowledge for policy. The critical requirement is a nucleus of persons who are determined to work together over a number of years. Among the criteria to be considered in selecting a topic are the needs of the civic and public order. Those who are in the civic order (universities, etc.) may plan "counterpart seminars" to parallel structures of government, selected functions, or problems. The agenda of a seminar calls for the consideration of any particular pattern in relation to its context in social process and evolves a distinctive audio-visual environment for the purpose. Successive attention is given to the clarification of goals, the description of trends, the analysis of conditions, the projection of developments, and the invention, evaluation and selection of alternatives. Continuity permits learning from self-corrective appraisal of past statements and roles. The technique can be diffused to official agencies.

Introduction

The policy sciences call for nontraditional methods of thinking about the problems involved in the making and execution of collective acts. If the policy sciences approach is to be disseminated at an accelerating rate it must be adapted to the educational system at all levels. The present discussion will outline some adjustments at relatively advanced stages of professional training. With little change the same procedures can be carried forward to the policy processes of government, business, and other social institutions, and backward to college, high school, and pre-high school instruction.

The complex nature of the policy sciences approach is suggested by the terms in which we consider the subject. We identify three principal features: the approach is *contextual*, *problem-oriented*, and *multimethod*.¹ How does one apply this orientation in concrete situations?

The problem is manageable if we think of it as a strategy to be followed in organizing the focus of attention of a policy analyst or a policymaker. Two sets of complementary principles are available: principles of *content* and of *procedure*. The former

¹ See my discussion of "The Emerging Policy Sciences" in *Policy Sciences* 1 (Spring 1970), 3-14.

principles are concerned with what is perceived; the latter with the order in which content is brought to the focus of attention.

Content and procedure are intimately interconnected. The contextual requirement of the policy sciences emphasizes the importance of utilizing a model of the entire social process, which is a matter of analytic content. If the model is to be used efficiently it is advantageous to fix upon a *sequence* in which the chief features of the social process are thought about. Similarly, the stress on problem-orientation is a means of underlining five intellectual tasks: the classifying of goals, the description of trends, the analysis of conditions, the projection of developments, the invention (evaluation and solution) of alternatives. Procedurally considered, it is efficient to deal with these tasks in a regular order. The use of multiple methods is a feature of the policy sciences that draws attention to ways of classifying techniques of theory formation and data gathering or processing. Procedural principles indicate the probable advantage of raising questions of method in a regular manner.

The continuing decision seminar is a device that can be modified to meet the requirements of a policy sciences approach in a wide range of situations. It is, for example, particularly relevant to the intelligence and appraisal functions of public or private organizations.² Our immediate problem is to show how it can be an efficient aid to the training of policy scientists themselves. The suggestion is that professional schools will find the continuing decision seminar to be the instructional tool best adjusted to the fundamental approach.

A decision seminar is explicitly concerned with *knowledge of the policy process and with the evaluation of knowledge for policy*. This double objective follows from the working definition of the policy sciences as focused on the accumulation of knowledge *of* and *for* the policy process. An instructional seminar deals explicitly with the theory of decisional operations, including the seminar itself.

The emphasis on *continuity* is intended to underline an essential factor if a seminar is to operate most efficiently. An important requirement of a problem-oriented approach is the evaluation of past estimates of future events. Obviously this is most effectively done when the seminar continues long enough to permit a group's past projections to refer to events that have not become contemporary.

The continuity criterion implies that the decision seminars of a professional school will bear no necessary relationship to the coming and going of the student or even the faculty population. The critical requirement is a *nucleus* of persons who are determined to work together over a number of years. There may be some change in the nucleus, but not enough to break up the undertaking. Other participants may come and go, sometimes as full members, often as expert witnesses or collaborators on limited tasks. A decision seminar may cultivate *spin-off groups* to concentrate on related problems and to communicate from time to time. The seminar may also encourage coordinate groups to concern themselves with the same basic problem in a different location. These coordinate groups, too, may on occasion constitute a *network* of intercommunicating units.

² For definitions of the terms employed in analyzing the social process and the decision process, see the article mentioned in footnote 1.

Among the criteria to be considered in selecting a decision seminar are the needs of the *civic* and of the *public order*. The public order is composed of the official agencies of the body politic, whether at national, transnational, or subnational levels. If the public order is to function most effectively in a society where popular discussion is feasible, the civic order must perform a critical and inventive function that feeds into the public order process.

What is involved, for instance, can be described by imagining a network of *counterpart seminars* organized in connection with professional schools, colleges, and other private associations. One set of counterpart seminars can parallel selected official and semiofficial *structures* of government. Among the agencies specialized to the *intelligence* function are planning commissions at the municipal, state, national, or transnational level. The *promotional* structures include the executive bodies of the political parties or pressure groups. Among the *prescribing* organs are the principal committees of legislative bodies. The *invoking* function is the principal task of the office of the police or the prosecuting authorities. *Application* functions (which are the final characterization of a concrete set of facts in terms of prescriptions) are carried out by administrative commissions, courts, and department heads. *Termination* operations involve the cancellation of legislative or other prescriptions, and the adjustment of the resulting claims for compensation or relocation. Housing authorities use special agencies for these tasks. The *appraisal* function is executed by commissions of inquiry that evaluate the degree to which policy directives have been put into effect and the allocation of responsibility for success or failure.

A counterpart seminar that parallels a given structure of government seeks to clarify the goals appropriate to the assessment of the agency involved. The seminar gathers data that make it possible to describe trends toward realizing, or failing to realize, these goals. The group undertakes to explain the factors that account for the success or failure of the decision process to yield appropriate results. Projections are made of the probable future of the structure and of its level of effectiveness. Policy alternatives are invented or evaluated that might enable the agency to improve its future performance. The seminar might decide to invent strategies of its own for the purpose of influencing the official structure in question. In this case the seminar projects the probable success or failure of its own efforts, and analyzes the feedback through time of its own activities.

Counterpart seminars may be organized in reference to a function rather than a structure. For example, a *functional counterpart seminar* might deal with one of the seven categories mentioned above (intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination, appraisal) and follow it through the governmental process at the national, transnational, or subnational level. The structures mentioned before as relatively specialized to each function neither monopolize the performance of a function nor fail to perform no other functions themselves. Investigation shows that to some extent every official structure necessarily performs every function and that the degree of participation in the function varies through time.

A third possibility is the organization of *counterpart problem seminars*. They focus on a task that cuts across structures and functions, such as improving the level of

security in the world community, or of obtaining and retaining appropriately motivated and capable personnel for public services.

Whether the seminars are focused on structures, functions, or problems they provide a means of policy instruction, since they are workshops through the years for faculty, students, alumni, and other selected participants. These seminars are close enough to the actual decision operations of the body politic to arouse motivation, without having the degree of responsibility that distracts attention from the learning process.

Schools or programs of advanced study in the policy sciences are able to explore the usefulness of counterpart seminars and to develop a model for civic education that may spread to college and precollege years.³

It need not be assumed that all the seminars will be decision seminars, since there may be "spin-offs" whose scope will be narrowed to specific technical operations. For instance, a *technical seminar* may devote itself to the choice of operational indices for all governmental activities, and to the designing of storage and retrieval networks. Or a seminar may concentrate on a single intellectual task in reference to a selected historical or contemporary body politic. The following titles indicate what is meant: "The Philosophy of Democracy," "The History of the Police," "The Effect of Chemicals on Behavior," "The Comparison of Projective Techniques," "The Limits of Zero-Sum Models."

Decision seminars are not limited in principle to governmental institutions. In fact, it is not possible to put governmental agencies in proper perspective unless they are compared with private institutions that operate in the same social context. This inference follows from the "interactive" character of social process, and from the impossibility that any specific structure can monopolize the shaping and sharing of any one value (power, wealth, enlightenment, etc.).

Policy training programs may be directed toward the needs of institutions other than government. Hence they will emphasize counterpart seminars chosen with reference to the sector of the social process on which they specialize. Besides the value-institution sector concerned with political power, our model of the social process includes:

- Enlightenment (e.g., several media of communication, research laboratories)
- Wealth (e.g., financial, manufacturing, agricultural, mining operations)
- Well-being (e.g., hospitals, accident prevention, recreation)
- Skill (e.g., schools for vocational, professional, and artistic training)
- Affection (e.g., family planning associations, family formation and dissolution)
- Respect (e.g., associations to preserve or undermine castes and classes)
- Rectitude (e.g., associations specialized to ethical, religious, or countermoves activities)

The following professional schools are among those having a latent or explicit policy sciences emphasis that deals with one or another of the sectors mentioned: business, communication, public health, education, family and welfare, ethnic and racial studies, religion. The schools more directly concerned with public order are,

³ The potentiality of counterpart seminars for one major task is outlined in Lasswell, "Toward Continuing Appraisal of the Impact of Law on Society," *Rutgers Law Review* 21 (1967), 645-677.

for instance, schools of public policy, law, administration, military strategy, and international relations.

The traditional university is specialized to enlightenment, which is the advancement of knowledge. Policy science programs deserve to be in universities to the extent that they live up to the requirement that they contribute to the advancement of knowledge *of* and *in* the decision (policy) process. Specialized policy science programs emphasize the first criterion, which is knowledge *of* the process. Every scientific and professional school needs to cultivate awareness of the social consequences and policy implications of knowledge in general, but with special reference to the knowledge closest to their competence. Continuing decision seminars provide a means by which specialists can be reminded throughout their careers of the social consequences and policy implications of knowledge. Such an instructional device can enable them to maintain a degree of awareness of the larger social context on which they depend, and with which they perpetually interact.

Requirements and Procedures

We are now in a position to consider in detail the requirements and procedures that distinguish the continuing decision seminar technique from other instructional devices.⁴ We have emphasized the preliminary requirement of a *small nucleus* of self-constituted members. The accent is on a committee or panel rather than a legislative size assembly or congregation. The nuclear standard is proposed as a means of focusing full responsibility on the problem in hand, since common experience tells us how often the degree of involvement in a collective undertaking varies inversely with the size of the membership.

Closely related to this criterion is the *determination to continue*. The contrast is with "one-shot performances" or with committees having a rapidly shifting membership where the discussion must be kept on an introductory and general level, and where experience is not cumulative. In this connection it is to be stressed that the recruitment of a self-motivated group does not always occur quickly.

A university environment is relatively rich in specialized talent, but it is notorious that the traditional academic person is an individualist trained to search for new truth, hence to challenge accepted opinions, and to search for novelties that justify his claim to original discovery. Cultivating the mind is an elusive career, partly because the external behavior of the creative person often provides no dependable clue to what goes on inside his brain. There is some reluctance to adhere to a schedule that obligates one to think about the same thing at the same time. Hence in university circles it is often a complicated operation to build groups that are unified in problem and purpose.

⁴ Previous consideration of the decision seminar technique, not necessarily for instructional purposes: Lasswell, "The Technique of Decision Seminars," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 4 (1960), 213-236; "Decision Seminars: The Contextual Use of Audio-visual Means in Teaching, Research, and Consultation," in R. L. Merritt and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Comparing Nations: The Use of Quantitative Data in Cross-National Research* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 498-524.

Several approaches have been partially successful in achieving unity under various circumstances. When the graduate faculty of the New School for Social Research was organized in the thirties in New York City it was composed of professors who had escaped from Germany and Italy. They were sufficiently unified by their experience to celebrate the importance of human freedom and to understand the fragility of the factors that sustain it. They were united by concern for, and commitment to, the knowledge enterprise as a whole; and they found it congenial to meet as a faculty seminar to consider the wide range of questions in which all were interested. The Faculty Seminar was not a true decision seminar, since it lacked a sufficiently defined frame of reference. But it provided a seminal situation in which congenial minds could discover one another and eventually collaborate on particular matters.

A more structured arrangement developed at Columbia University, where participation in a Faculty Seminar was fully accredited as part of the "course obligation" of an interested faculty member. Many articles and books have taken shape in these seminars. Although interdisciplinary in composition, the exercises on Morningside Heights have rarely been true decision seminars, since they often lack a future-reference orientation.

Interest in the future is no guarantee of continuous and coherent involvement in decision seminars, although a "future seminar" is often an important step in enabling teams of interested colleagues to "spin off" and work together. A recent experience at Yale is illustrative. During one year a group of faculty members from different departments outlined future developments in their areas of competence (China, the Soviet Union, youth, etc.). After a year the feeling was that the group should delimit the field; and the result was a number of group activities, some of which began to approximate fully developed decision seminars.

After the motivation requirement is met the path is open to arrange for a sufficiently high *frequency* of meeting to maintain progress on the common task. In practice this standard can be met in many different ways. There may be periods of joint activity at daily, weekly, or fortnightly periods; or circumstances may indicate the wisdom of a longer rhythm. The latter is especially important when the members are widely dispersed and can only come together at some cost. Specialists on global regions, for instance, are likely to be divided between those who are at their usual headquarters (e.g., university, institute, official post) and those in the field. As institutions of advanced education become more accustomed to off-campus activity, the problems of joint operation assume less formidable proportions. And this would presumably be characteristic of advanced policy training programs. Field expeditions are already an ordinary feature of many law and graduate schools, and are increasingly acceptable during part of the traditional academic year. For a long time American anthropologists have given major emphasis to the importance of knowing how to gather data in the field; and a comparable practice is spreading through neighbouring social sciences.

The *internship* practice, for example, is well adapted to the purpose of supplementing campus experience. Political scientists in the United States, for instance, have explored several arrangements of the kind through their professional societies. Intern-

ships have been available for a year or more at every level of government—federal, state, and local. They have been adjusted to the needs of legislators and legislative committees, of executives and administrators, and of political party and lobbying organizations. It has long been customary for the justices of the Supreme Court and of other courts to hire law clerks who serve as apprentices for a year or so. This technique has also been extended to the courts of developing nations, notably in Africa.

Although these arrangements perform an important educational function for the individuals involved and generate personal ties that foster promising careers, internship programs are open to some objection. The chief difficulty is that the apprentice can become so absorbed in his task that he loses the analytic perspective, which is what prevents him from becoming “another political hack” or a “petty clerk.” This difficulty can be overcome by the continuing seminar technique because auxiliary seminars can be developed to accommodate the needs of interns. A continuing workshop or seminar on the key committees of Congress, for example, can be organized at a university with a nucleus of professors, alumni, and off-campus figures who keep the undertaking alive. They can use *auxiliary seminars* to accommodate task forces whose term of activity is relatively brief. By utilizing the auxiliary seminar or task force device an intern can be confronted with the challenge to cope analytically with his experience and to discover how it can be used to contribute to a basic problem (such as following the trends of institutional change and anticipating their presumptive lines of growth).

Frequency, then, is a programmatic detail of great though variable importance for decision seminar technique. A more complex requirement is the *commitment of seminar members to a disciplined and contextual program*. This phrase is intended to suggest that much more is implied than in what are traditionally called seminars.

The seminar of academic tradition does, however, carry some connotations that are worth keeping, and which justify perpetuating the name. A seminar is a group in which *everybody works on something new*. The usual image has been for a professor to guide the research of students who are mature enough to contribute to the advancement of knowledge. In practice, seminars shade off the ideal image in many directions (as when pedestrian summaries of the present state of knowledge are tolerated). A seminar may move toward a research team of equals in which the apprenticeship or teaching feature vanishes; or the research project is so tightly defined and executed that younger participants become research assistants of the principal figure, who may have no interest in encouraging independent approaches to the central or allied problems.

The decision seminar technique adds something to the fundamental demand and expectation that everyone will be at work on something new. As we have said, a seminar is supposed to *use procedures that enable its members to contribute to our knowledge of decision or to evaluate the significance of knowledge for selected decisions*. Hence whatever the scope of the undertaking it is conducted with this theoretical responsibility in view; and to be in view implies that *it is explicitly emphasized throughout*.

Assume for example that the exercise is planned to be a *counterpart* seminar that parallels a structure of government. One recurring question would be what light the study has thus far thrown on the general theory of decision, or more narrowly, on the factors that affect the functioning of a certain category of the structures in the power process. In the course of its activities the seminar would explore interconnections between the structure and the other structures in the political process (also interconnections with structures in the social context outside the sector specialized to the shaping and sharing of power). The five problem-oriented tasks would be dealt with (goal, trend, condition, projection, alternatives). In a highly approximate agenda for seminar meetings these theoretical tasks would be taken up in recurring sequence.

In any case presentations by individuals to the group would make use of audio-visual aids, and deposit charts, graphs, or related material for subsequent sessions. The employment of *audiovisual devices* is no idle exploitation of decorative ideas. We know that many able people are unable to absorb merely verbal presentations as rapidly or accurately as they can respond to visual modes. The maps and charts are helpful means of storing and recalling information. The sight of the relatively permanent visual material recalls the original presentation, including the discussion. Hence the group develops in more cumulative fashion than is otherwise possible.

Every policy seminar evolves its own *audiovisual environment*. Sometimes a very primitive allocation of exhibit space on the walls of a room is a unifying step. For instance, one such seminar devotes one wall to "analytic" charts outlining the social process model, the decision model, and the five problem-solving tasks. It also contains a map of the earth's environment in space which is drawn on a scale that expresses distances as multiples of familiar dimensions in the earth's immediate environment. The wall also exhibits a map indicating the broad lines of the earth's evolution as a habitat for living forms. The space might well include a projected future for the earth and the cosmos. (At present the input of information from radio astronomy and space probes is rapidly modifying our accepted notions. The principal models are in lively debate.)

The remaining wall space in the seminar is apportioned to two sets of presentations, one serving as a reminder of the "social process" categories as they refer to the world community, the other to decision functions. The convention is established that eye-level is the present, and that the arrow of time flies from the floor to the ceiling. Hence past trends and conditions are located below; future projections lie above. Material that deals with the future includes "passive projections" of things as they are likely to be, and "preferred projections" of goals and strategies.

In some seminars the stock of accumulated visuals grows slowly, since one procedural principle is to *give priority to material that has been prepared and introduced by members of the group itself*. This is part of the "do it yourself" strategy designed to counteract the tendency to "think by delegation," and to hear reports from "experts." Seminar members benefit from taking responsibility for a presentation and for preparing themselves to disclose the sources on which they rely and the interpretations that they prefer to accept. A reporting member may actually be an accepted expert in the field of his principal presentation, although this is not always an advantage, since

his very expertness has probably led to built-in biases connected with the particular school of economics, politics, or sociology, for instance, where he was trained.

Many means are available to nullify or weaken the effects of bias. The basic procedure, of course, is the *critical examination* of the original presentation by all the members. Another is to hold a session where an outside specialist is invited to act as an *expert witness*, not as a permanent member of the caste.

No restrictions are placed on the sources or the method of reporting adopted by a particular member. Some reports may bring together the results of an original research conducted on a transnational scale with ample public or private funding. Supporting documentation may be circulated in advance or after the initial discussion. The visual material may be presented as slides projected on a screen, or made available as a "card pack" to each individual. And what is chosen as the principal continuing exhibit may be a tiny part of the total report submitted for the *permanent files* of the seminar, which may include *tie-in arrangements* with data storage and retrieval systems, and consoles where seminar participants can immediately and directly manipulate data. In some instances a continuing seminar can evolve a huge *social planetarium* where the semipermanent exhibits are prepared and evaluated by the group.⁵ Films can be prepared and kept at hand to assist the enterprise as its members "live their way" into the past and future.

Whatever the procedures adopted for exhibits, the crucial point is the experience of the members of the seminar in ordering their focus of attention in a contextual and problem-oriented sequence. Hence *a feature of each presentation is the giving of explicit attention to the interconnections of the items under discussion.*

For instance, if the seminar is located in a divinity school and is devoted to the policies of an order devoted to religious training, some reports will undoubtedly deal with educational trends, conditions, and projection. Others will help to evaluate their significance for policy alternatives intended to contribute to the realization of the overriding goals. Trends in instruction can be clarified by the act of relating them to corresponding trends in other religious settings, and in secular society. Any explanation that is offered of factors that affect the direction and magnitude of trends can be evaluated in the light of comparative researches inside and outside the institutional system. The hypothesis that "strictness" in requiring work to be completed is a factor in any falling off of interest in religious interaction may be abandoned if it can be shown that "strictness" is welcomed when it is associated with new techniques of presenting old material, such as gaming. Alternative future policies may include the question how religious training programs can conceivably make a welcome contribution to the several sectors of society—political, economic, and so forth. Following such procedures can bring new questions to mind and pave the way for a whole new set of proposals. For instance, it may be suggested that a religious order should undertake preschool education in "child care" centers where working parents can leave their youngsters. This proposal requires careful evaluation in terms of its technical

⁵ On the social planetarium see Lasswell, "Strategies of Inquiry: The Rational Use of Observation," in Daniel Lerner, ed., *The Human Meaning of the Social Sciences* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 89–113.

requirements, prospects of support, and repercussions on the place of religion in the community.

It may be that a policy seminar becomes so impressed with a particular set of possibilities that it *alters its original plan* drastically in the hope of obtaining an important new result. A seminar on the urban political process, for example, may find itself absorbed by rediscovering the importance of "protean man," as Robert J. Lifton calls the modern character with no strong inner system of value-tactical orientation. This may lead to an examination of the "alienation" phenomenon, and to the suggestion that prototypical projects can throw a bright light on the way in which young people can experience a strong sense of community. Or if the initial seminar was on "Energy Sources in the World of Tomorrow," it might find out about the potentials of solar energy and decide to become a study and promotional group dedicated to the marshaling of support for world action on behalf of a satellite capable of supplying the energy needs of man indefinitely, and do so free of the pollution connected with fossil fuel.

Because of the enormous importance of *cultivating creativity* it is probable that many decision seminars will explore ways and means of stimulating novel and realistic innovation. The essential strategy is provided for in the procedures outlined above, since the principal provocation for creativity is exposure to incomplete or inconsistent contours in a general map of reality. An artist is sufficiently skilled to resolve the clashing lines of landscape and factory, or the incompatible colors of posters, flowers, and dumps. A policy-oriented person can perceive contradictions between advertising that presents high consumption standards as an implied reward of personal charm, and the prevalence of moralistic admonitions to cultivate attributes other than charm. The significant question is how one proceeds to modify the balance, if one decides to try?

Many tactics have occasionally succeeded in releasing creative ideas. A fundamental principle is that "controlled repression" enables the individual to achieve contact with unconscious processes, thereby widening his range of mood and imagery. Without altering the external environment inner changes may be enough to allow new possibilities to be imagined and realized in reality.

Some of the time-honoured devices of mankind are connected with alcohol, opium, and other *self-administered* chemicals. The classic story concerns the Persian military commanders who are supposed to have drunk heavily at night and fantasied wildly about battle plans. The next morning action was taken on whatever survived the cold light of hangovers.

Even without the chemical crutch it is feasible to obtain the same result if the group is congenial and willing to encourage and tolerate "brainstorming," or the uttering of uncensored suggestions. This adaptation of the psychoanalytic technique of *free association* is well within the command of any seminar whose members create the appropriate environment for one another.

A seminar group may occasionally agree to explore the creative possibilities of a "sensitivity group," or of adopting some other procedure designed to increase the awareness of each participating member of the image that he projects to others. More than free association is involved in sensitivity sessions since the problem is to discover how A perceives B and how B in turn is perceived by A. This calls for violation

of the traditional rules of polite reticence in personal relations. Hence attempts to lead an inexperienced group in this direction may fail, either because the barriers to candid disclosure are too strong, or because the first steps are resented. The participants in the exercise may not agree that the advantages from "insight" will outweigh the "humiliations" that they must endure from one another. It is by no means certain that the emerging culture of candor will be accepted universally. It may be that plain speaking introduces complications into a "limited cooperation group" that are better done without. In any case, the decision seminar is free to make up its mind whether to take or leave sensitivity groups.

The influence of a group on creativity cannot be adequately assessed by restricting attention to the manner in which its members respond in the presence of other members. The important insights often come in privacy, sometimes in preparation for group discussion, though often as an aftermath. Members can be encouraged to experiment with *free fantasy* and *meditation* procedures privately.

The policy seminar technique can probably become familiar without putting a stop to inventiveness, since the entire procedure is *self-correction by disciplined experience of context*. By expecting change, and taking it for granted that every new detail may provide a clue to a redefined image of the whole, group members are kept alert.

A particular aspect of this process is the *reevaluation of past constructs about the future*. Almost from the first meeting a seminar group can subject itself to the discipline of making specific predictions of future events. And if these predictions include short-term projections the seminar can benefit by examining the congruence of forecast and occurrence. On the grounds of what inferences were the forecasts made? In the light of subsequent happenings how might the forecasts have been improved? What implications are there for coming events?

It is worth noting that *ego-defense* is an important operation for practically everybody, and it may be expedient in a rivalrous world to conduct some decision seminars in ways that put least strain on delicate ego systems. As suggested before, ego-defenses may be too high to permit a seminar to experiment with sensitivity sessions. An example of adaptation is the procedure employed by a group of Wall Street economists who are in competition with one another for important jobs, but who also recognize the advantages of working together within the limits of recognized rules. Each member of the group fills out a schedule answering very specific questions about market fluctuations. It is impossible to "weasel" since the answers are in terms of numerical quotations. A trusted person summarizes the aggregate results and reports them to the group for discussion. The procedure could be extended to the consideration of past forecasts by reporting only the aggregate judgment. (Incidentally, the records of the individual economists are on file and may be released to a specific person if the individual is sufficiently happy with the record.)

Many policy training groups will disdain the ego-defensiveness of the Wall Street economists and join in candid appraisal of their past estimates. They may also agree to supplement group deliberations by having an occasional analysis of seminar proceedings made by an outside specialist. Sometimes the report may enable a member to become aware of a bias that he may plan to overcome, or at least to take into account.

Some participants seem to play a rather stably sanguine or pessimistic role in regard to such matters as the level of employment or the probability of an enlarging or diminishing war. The group as a whole may disclose a characteristic bias. It may be helpful in the long run to examine in detail *the consequences of "insight" statements*. Are they simply disregarded as a result of the tendency to forget or to "hear" unwelcome comment? It is possible to identify persons who are, on the contrary, disposed to overreact against their previous role? Do insight exercises decrease the courage with which unconventional views are put forward?

Several procedures can be employed to test *certainty and stability of judgment*. Any discussion serves this purpose to the extent that it allows the participants to formulate their positions in detail. In general the atmosphere of a policy seminar is expected to be that of open *inquiring* minds. A major purpose would be defeated if it were turned into a promotional forum where previously frozen positions are defended to the bitter end. We note that inquiry is not incompatible with differences of opinion or with outspoken, vigorous argument. It is a matter of everyday experience to observe that old and trusted friends may sound like irreconcilable enemies to an eavesdropping stranger who is not sure how to interpret what he hears. The participants may be amusing themselves in mock battle; or they may be dead serious and fully comfortable with conflict without the contamination of mutual distrust or disrespect.

As a precaution against the oversights that result from the blandness of too facile agreement it may be helpful to introduce some version of the ancient practice of appointing a *devil's advocate* whose assignment would be to develop the case for alternatives likely to be omitted or excluded from careful consideration. This introduction of adversarial procedure is not intended to dominate the deliberations of the seminar but to act as an occasional challenge to established approaches and thoughtways. The adversarial approach, which is the principal device utilized in the law courts of countries with an English tradition, is an unsatisfactory model for the ordinary conduct of decision seminars because it diverts *too much attention to stating and applying rules of procedure*. Wherever detailed and explicit rules are supposed to be adhered to by a group, there is need of an umpire to protect the deliberations from being interrupted by controversies over procedure. This is time-consuming; but more to the point is the temptation that the adversarial situation embodies to encourage gamesmanship in winning points by fooling or wheedling the umpire-judge-chairman into making decisions of little consequence save to the manipulators who want to come out on top. The attention of the group is channeled into frequent "win-lose" (zero-sum game) confrontations, and the significant objectives of the undertaking are lost sight of.

Nonetheless a competitive game situation has advantages that can be utilized for seminar purposes. Human beings can be readily mobilized by pitting themselves against one another in a "win-lose" contest. A seminar group may dissolve occasionally into *simulation exercises* in which the political arena is emulated (whether on a world scale, or in reference to less inclusive communities). Members may be divided into teams to play the role of top decisionmakers in the United States, Soviet Russia, mainland China, for instance. An assignment may be to imagine the sequence of

events if China moves into Nepal. Such a game requires an umpire to take responsibility for "reality" and to decide which moves have what effects.

By this time it is well established that simulation gaming is an experience that does in fact succeed in evoking the competitive impulses of participants. It is also clear that gaming is a means of conferring a vivid sense of reality of future contingencies. The competitors discover many expectations about the future that they may want to reconsider in the light of their experiences in simulation exercises. The fact that an umpire may disagree with their own estimates of reality is itself a challenging occurrence, and it may or may not lead to a revised view of contingencies.

But simulation gaming has limitations that render it unsatisfactory as a total substitute for seminar procedure. The umpire is the judge; hence it is tempting to study the judge and to learn to manipulate the game in ways that take advantage of his assumptions about reality. When the exercises degenerate into a confrontation of this kind the familiar consequences of an adversarial procedure manifest themselves. Attention is diverted from realities external to the immediate situations, and one of its principal objectives is frustrated.

If the place of an umpire is taken by the "program" that defines the costs and benefits of different categories of choice, the problem of analyzing the umpire is transferred to the study of the programmer. It is reported, for example, that some simulation exercises have a built-in bias in favor of bold, high-risk choices; hence the player who recognizes this is able to benefit.

Whatever its limitations, a decision seminar can benefit from the "shake-up" effects of simulation gaming. Predispositions are challenged; and this is a means of uncovering previously unrecognized expectations, demands, and identifications.

The most obvious way to alter the predispositions of a group is to change its *social and personality composition*. If the decision seminar movement brings about global seminar networks it will be possible to use them for the purpose of examining in a systematic and relatively intensive manner the significance of the various predispositions distributed about the world for the policy process. This may become one of the important institutions for conducting a continuing self-survey of global dispositions to act for "man" or for various subdivisions of mankind.

It is not difficult to enumerate many factors that can usefully affect the choice of personnel in decision seminars. Assuming the same field of specialization for a moment, it is evident that predispositions are affected by length of exposure to the specialty (roughly measured by age), type of methodological training (e.g., mathematico-statistical, historical and comparative, philosophical, legalistic), and category of professional activity (e.g., teaching, research, consultation, administration). Also, affiliation with or exposure to various cultures (e.g., national, ethnic); social classes (elite, mid-elite, rank and file of transnational, national, subnational power, enlightenment, wealth, well-being, affection, respect, rectitude); interest groups (less than class or interclass); personality groups (value priorities, mechanisms). The same variables are pertinent to every speciality; and the specialties in varying proportion will affect results.

It is relevant for a working group to catalog the many hypotheses that are open to

confirmation (or disconfirmation) in reference to the functioning of decision seminars of varying composition. In general, it will probably be found that the greater the heterogeneity the longer the time required for detailed mutual understanding. The most significant variables appear to be those that affect value commitments for or against human dignity; expectations of an indulgent or deprivational future for one's preferences; self-confidence and creative imagination in devising strategies to optimize purposes. Commitment to human dignity appears to depend in high degree on indoctrination in a cultural setting where this is the prevailing ideology. It is traditional to expect the young to exhibit a wider spectrum of social attitudes than the older generation.

Diffusion

The future of decision seminars as an instructional technique depends on the experience of those who try it. Hence it is important to consider the expected and realized value payoffs that participants receive. In a training environment teachers and taught must perceive that they are relatively better off by spending time in decision seminars than by engaging in other training exercises. The point is not that this particular device will or ought to monopolize the instructional program. Rather, the inference is that its relative place will ultimately depend on its perceived relationship to alternative exercises.

Presumably the principal aim of policy training is to contribute to the skill and enlightenment of all concerned. We have mentioned many pertinent skills, such as the projection of future events and the continuing critique of forecasts in the light of occurrences. Reference has also been made to the cultivation of creativity by inventing realistic policy objectives and strategies. A complete inventory of skills would include some of the capabilities more commonly utilized in conventional training, such as the handling of historical sources, the formation of sophisticated scientific theories (models, hypotheses), the conduct of interviews, and other procedures of data gathering and processing. Each identifiable skill is appropriate to the expansion of knowledge *of* and *in* decision processes. Of particular concern to our instructional aims is enlightenment, a valued outcome that goes beyond the bits of knowledge essential to any specific skill. Enlightenment "goes beyond" skill in the sense that it is contextual. To be enlightened about man and society is to be in command of an explicit map of the whole.

It is, of course, impossible for anyone to escape an *implicit* map of the self-in-context. But the cognitive map is rarely brought deliberately or fully into the open unless the individual is exposed to an instructional experience that rewards him by bringing the implicit image of reality to the full focus of waking awareness. This is the sense in which policy training operations are designed to influence the *content* made available at the focus of attention and to adopt the *procedures* effectively adapted to the task. The enlightened person is aware of his assumptions about the past, present, and future of himself, his cultural environment, and his natural environment. Our recommended goal is to provide *undogmatic* access to inclusive versions of reality, so

that the chances are increased that the individual will use his own capabilities of imagination and judgment.

The policy science emphasis is itself in continual tension with tendencies to disintegrate the contextual orientation on behalf of a bundle of skills that can be “objectively” identified and tested. The policy science approach does not neglect or dispraise skill. On the contrary it encourages and integrates skill and provides a built-in challenge to the invention of new and improved operational capabilities.

The fundamental strategy of the decision seminar device is to subordinate detail to context, and to do so, not by neglecting detail but by subjecting each detail to the discipline of the relevant reality, which is the ever-unfolding map of the future. The map of the future is perceived, not as an instrument of the “inevitable” but as a tool of guided innovation and optimum change. The procedures employed in organizing the focus of attention in a contextual seminar are among the most direct means of contributing to the potential policy analyst and policy operator in every sector of public and civic order.

The tactics of an instructional program must be adapted to the predispositions of those who enter into it. Hence the flexibility implied in the scope of particular seminars (such as counterparts of structure, function, or problem), as well as the use of such auxiliary aids as audiovisual material, or the management of sensitivity, adversarial, simulation, and other means of enriching the experience.

Participants will become more confident of the benefits when decision seminar technique spreads to official and unofficial organizations. Many transitional arrangements will expediate diffusion, such as bringing some officials directly into seminars to function as full members. Many detailed problems arise in this connection, such as the confidentiality of official material. But these questions are not new, and have been met many times by officials who work with private consultants or engage to some extent in private teaching or research.

As decision seminars spread it becomes feasible for networks of such seminars to parallel their strategies and hence to exemplify a *strategy of simultaneity* in seeking to accomplish results.

Decision seminars are likely to be carried forward by policy scientists who take them for granted as the most appropriate means of conducting the intelligence and appraisal function for organizations and for individual decisionmakers.

Simultaneously, the technique will be carried backwards through the preprofessional stages of training until the concept of self-in-context will be implemented from the beginning to the end of life with due regard to the capacity of the developing human being for creative and continuing participation in the life of tomorrow.